

Strangers and Livyers: Perspectives on Newfoundland Seen through Prints and Engravings from the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

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Strangers and Livyers: Perspectives on Newfoundland Seen through Prints and Engravings from the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

SHANE O'DEA

IN PATRICK O'FLAHERTY'S study of Newfoundland writing, *The Rock Observed*, there is a pervasive idea that there are always two perceptions of Newfoundland: that of the stranger—the visitor who, by accident or design, comes and goes—and that of the livyer—the inhabitant, the permanent resident who stays.¹ The view of any country, but particularly of a small country, is generally then a dual one. This duality is a product of the relationship of the viewer to the country, whether it be as stranger or livyer, and produces two categories of print: those which serve to illustrate a magazine or book (the illustrations) and those which are intended for framing (the pictorials). It is in this way that Newfoundland prints must be seen because the viewer, as artist, is stranger or livyer and the viewer, as owner, is stranger or livyer. As a consequence, both types of prints depend on differing perspectives—of artist and owner—as well as on different attitudes, changing circumstances.

And, there being only a limited clientele for such prints until the nineteenth century, to speak of Newfoundland prints before that time is to force a fiction. Of the four earlier prints in Charles de Volpi's standard work *Newfoundland: A Pictorial Record* one is a version of a map vignette; one a portrait of Lord Rodney, who was at one time governor of Newfoundland (a fact which the print ignores); and one a spurious French view of the capture of St. John's in 1762. The only work of the group one could call a Newfoundland print is that of George Cartwright on the Labrador. Others do exist in French texts of the eighteenth century: Duhamel du Monceau (1769-1782) and Bacqueville de la Potherie (1722) have a number of engravings illustrating the Newfoundland

fishery.

Recently, however, two early seventeenth-century engravings have been discovered in Theodore de Bry's *Dreyzehender Theil Americae* (1628) which show Richard Whitbourne's encounter with a mermaid in St. John's Harbour (Fig. 1)² and John Guy's meeting with the Beothuks in Trinity Bay. As is typical in such works the engravings are illustrations of what the artist has read rather than what he has seen. The engraver was presumably working from a German translation of the 1625 edition of *Purchas his Pilgrimes* and put in his pictures as much as possible of the text describing the Beothuks and the strange creature in the harbour (Purchas, Part 2, Book 10, 1880-1, 1887-8). As a consequence there is a simultaneous presentation in each print of events which occurred at different times and, because of language difficulties, what in English was a "bark canoe" becomes in German an "excavated tree" (operated by an Englishman) becomes in the engraving a dugout (operated by the Beothuks).



Fig. 1. Theodore de Bry, *Dreyzehender Theil Americae*, p. 5, engraving. (Educational Television Centre, Memorial University—ETV MUN)

But this lack of early prints should not surprise when one considers that from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries Newfoundland was viewed only as a way-station and occasional battleground. As such, it was unlikely to excite

much public interest and the local inhabitants, attempting to establish themselves in their undeveloped land, had little time to view themselves in the mirror of an engraving.

The situation alters with the decline of the migratory fishery at the end of the eighteenth century and the development of a more permanent society in St. John's at the beginning of the nineteenth. In 1789, with the development of Fort Townshend, a professional military organization arrived to replace the somewhat ragged crew who had sporadically and spasmodically defended the country until then. With this military group came a civil service, a judiciary and, after the advent of a resident governor, a more elevated social class centred on Government House—itself a ramshackle collection of additions in Fort Townshend. Many of these people were well-educated and had that which went with or, in some cases, what was considered an adequate substitute for an education: an aesthetic sensibility, an artistic skill of sorts. A number of the naval officers on the Newfoundland station, among them Edward Chappell and Nicholas Pocock, had studied art and it is from their sketches that we have the earliest printed views of St. John's (de Volpi Pl. 14 and 16). Both men as well as their colleague Captain Edward Brenton took views from outside the harbour—a stranger's first sight of the town and the Narrows which guard it.

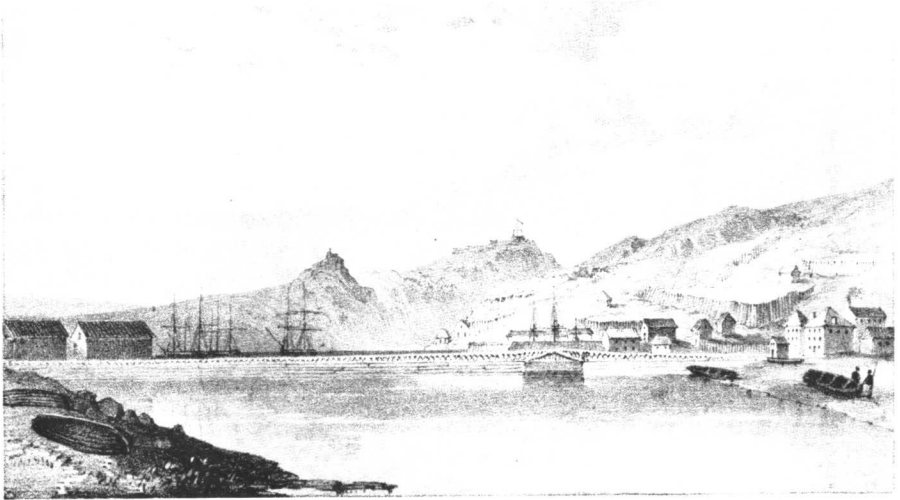


Fig. 2. Lt. A. Thompson, "Part of St. John's Harbour, Newfoundland, from above the Long Bridge, at River Head," lithograph, frontispiece, Bonnycastle, *Newfoundland in 1842*. Vol. 1. (Charles P. de Volpi)

And, as if to confirm a distinction between naval and military perspectives, two of the earlier views from the interior of the harbour are by Lieutenant A. Thompson of the Royal Artillery and were used in Richard Bonnycastle's book, *Newfoundland in 1842* (Fig. 2). One potentially significant figure was Colonel S. Wyatt of the Royal Engineers, who made a very fine series of sketches of St. John's in 1831 which, to judge by their detailing, were intended for

production as prints.³ Had they been produced, their quality would have rivalled that of any of the prints which followed. With the exception of Wyatt's work, other prints served as book illustrations and, in that sense, were intended for the information of strangers rather than for the pleasure of livyers.

The publication in 1831 of William Eagar's view of St. John's (locally known as *The Sleeping Soldier* because of a recumbent military figure in the foreground) marks the beginning of the pictorials (Fig. 3). Its appearance suggests that a local market had developed, for the production of such a print involved the sending of the painting or drawing to England for engraving, its printing there and return to Newfoundland for sale—generally by subscription. It would also have been available in England for those with Newfoundland connections. With the imminent establishment of a legislature, half a dozen newspapers in circulation and a steady growth in trade, a pride in place had developed in Newfoundland and in particular in its capital. Joseph Banks' judgement in 1766 that St. John's was "the Most Disagreeable Town I Ever met with" (Lysaght 146) was no longer entirely true—at least it was not felt to be true by those who lived there. Throughout the island there was a permanent and settled group of merchants and artisans who needed something to prove they had the cultural sensibility of their social superiors back in England. A print was an economical and discreet means of displaying this sensibility. Thus arose the possibility for topographical artists to pursue their trade.



Fig. 3. William Eagar, "The Town and Harbour of St. John's," engraving, H. Pyall, London, 1831. (Public Archives of Canada)

William Eagar (1796?-1839) appears to have been an artist by trade; he spent only a limited time in St. John's before moving to Halifax, where he did a number of topographical paintings. While his engraving is considered one of the finest of Newfoundland prints there is nonetheless a sense of rigidity about the presentation of the town's buildings, a rigidity later seen in Ruger's 1879 panoramic view of St. John's.

William Gosse (1806-1893), the son of a painter and brother to the naturalist Philip Henry Gosse, worked in Carbonear (on Conception Bay) with the firm of Pack, Gosse and Fryer. He did a number of sketches of towns on the western side of Conception Bay and of St. John's. His print of 1838—*A South-West View of St. John's, Newfoundland*—is unusual in its bleakness, yet attractive for all that (Fig. 4). A view depicting the harbour in the depths of winter, it shows the sealing fleet moving out through the Narrows. The subject matter is unusual principally because the scene would not generally be considered attractive enough to be easily sold. It is also unusual because it presents the colony from the point of view of a resident, not that of an occasional visitor who would only reach St. John's in summer.

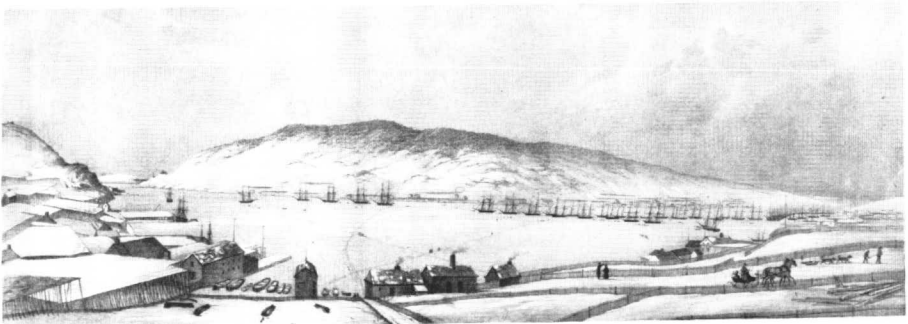


Fig. 4. William Gosse, "A South View of St. John's Harbour, Newfoundland," engraving. (ETV MUN)

These prints are followed by what is generally considered the finest pictorial, the one created by William Pardoe Clarke from the vicinity of Fort Amherst at the entrance to St. John's Harbour in 1845 (Fig. 5). Essentially it is similar to the earlier views of Chappell, Pocock and Brenton but is, because of its greater detail and finer composition, a much more effective piece. The view shows a fleet of boats, including an early steamer, entering the Narrows on a windy summer's day and seems to focus on a very foreign-looking goat in the foreground.

De Volpi has suggested that Clarke might have been an architectural draughtsman, in which case he is in company with the man who produced the finest group of Newfoundland pictorials, W. R. Best (1826-1896). Prepared for sale to subscribers, Best's first group of three views of St. John's and four illustrations of the town's principal buildings was prepared with Frederick R. Page (a surveyor and real estate agent) and lithographed by W. Spreat of Ex-

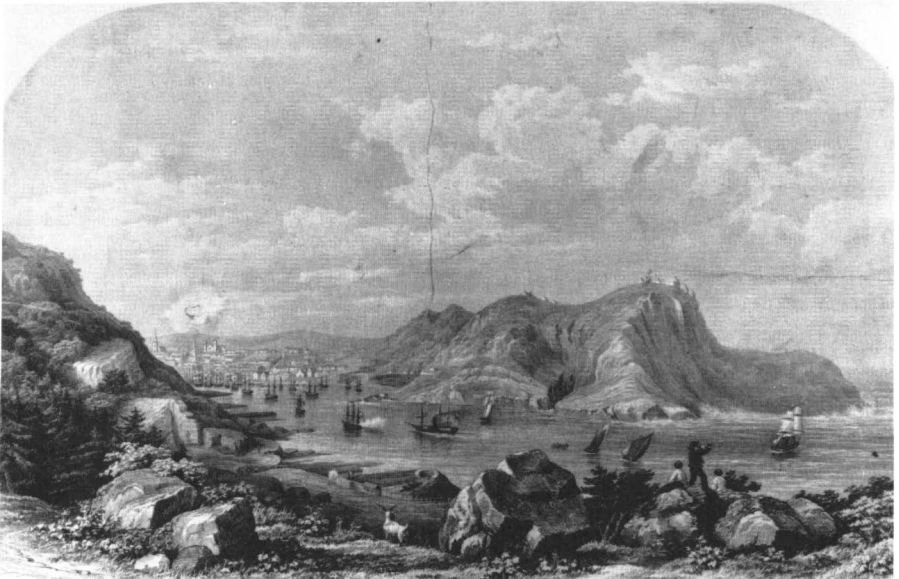


Fig. 5. William Pardoe Clarke, "Harbour, Town and Narrows of St. John's, Newfoundland," lithograph, Day and Haghe, London. (ETV MUN)

eter in 1851. Best was an architect, a fact which might explain his specific interest in buildings. It is presumed he was one of the group of craftspeople who came out from Exeter to rebuild St. John's following the Great Fire of 1846. In his second group of prints (one view and two buildings published in 1858) he signed the print of the Congregational Church as "Arch. et Delt." which suggests that this building was his work (Fig. 6). If so, it was probably the one of which Reverend William Grey speaks so disparagingly as "a sort of parody of Gothic, with bits cribbed from the Cathedral stuck in here and there" (159). His prints of buildings indicate his skill as a draughtsman; his views, his skill as an artist whose careful composition of light and shade and capacity to render figures well make his work superior to that of his contemporaries. With his presentation of individual buildings he is quite clearly appealing to a fairly self-satisfied group of livers (a term they would have rejected). After all, the public buildings of St. John's at mid-century, though impressive to Newfoundlanders, were not greatly different from those found in any provincial English town. That Best did succeed in appealing to this element of self-satisfaction is apparent in the fact that these prints, while rare, are generally found in most major Newfoundland collections.

Another group of artists who produced prints were the clergy. Frequently the well-educated younger sons of the English gentry, they were not always occupied with the business of saving souls whether they were posted to St. John's or an outpost. A possible alternative occupation was sketching, which, as is

apparent in the case of Reverend William Grey, was sometimes ardently pursued. The earliest view of St. John's (1801) is by Reverend J. Hall and is taken, as one would expect of a landsman, looking out through the Narrows (de Volpi Pl. 12). The Moravian missionaries are responsible for several prints of their northern settlements in Labrador. Three of these are by Bishop Levin Theodore Reichel (d. 1878), a president of the Moravian Church who visited Labrador in 1861 and 1876 (see Fig. 7). De Volpi has suggested that the excellent pictorial view of Greenspond in 1846 may also be by a cleric, Reverend Benjamin Smith (de Volpi Pl. 25). Reverend Philip Tocque (1814-1899), author of a number of books including *Wandering Thoughts* (1846) and *Newfoundland Almanack* (1849), presented in these books a number of his views of outpost communities which of all Newfoundland prints come closest to achieving a local perspective. These prints, though poorly drawn, show the communities much in the way the livyers might have seen them. Tocque is an exception to my point because in his case the dual perspective is diminished: he was a Newfoundlander born in Carbonear and stationed in the outports who was producing material for Newfoundlanders.



Fig. 6. W. R. Best, "Congregational Church," lithograph, W. Spreat, Exeter. (ETV MUN)

From the clergy then a more general picture of Newfoundland is obtained instead of the hitherto somewhat selective emphasis on St. John's. Some of the clergy were stationed throughout the country and frequently were there for extended periods in rather isolated circumstances, while others travelled on the



Fig. 7. L. T. Reichel, "Rama in Labrador," lithograph, *Missionsblatt aus der Brüdergemeine*, 41, June 1877, p. 216. (Rev. S. Hettasch)

missionary or church boats for summer visitations to communities without resident clergy.

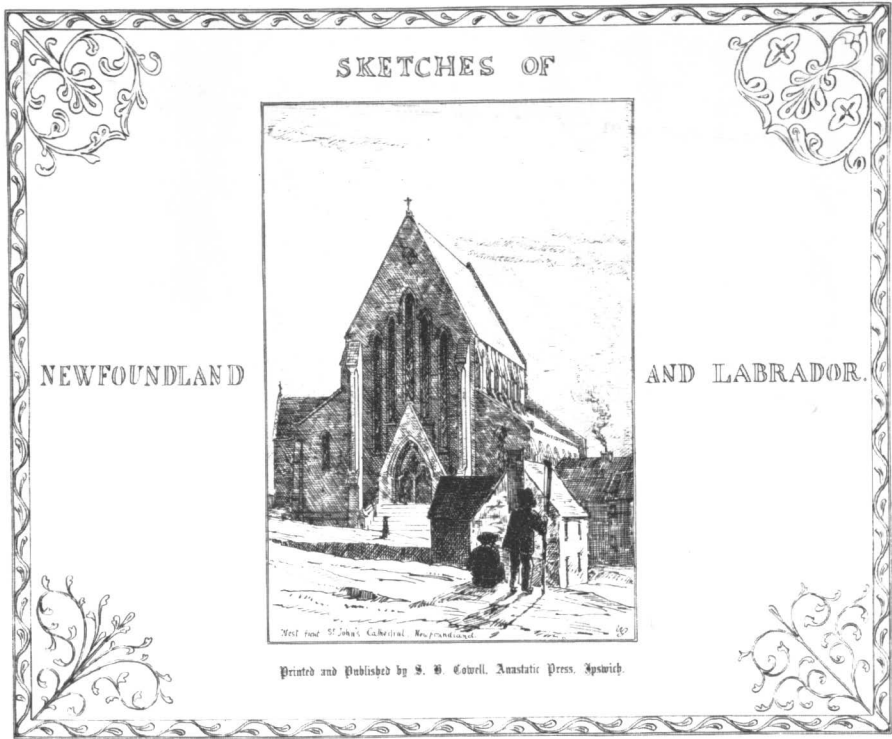


Fig. 8. Rev. Wm. Grey, *Sketches of Newfoundland and Labrador* (title page), engraving, S. H. Cowell, Ipswich. (ETV MUN)

It is to this last situation that we owe the sketches by William Grey, a portfolio of twenty-four prints published in 1857 (Fig. 8). Over half are views of the Labrador fishery stations which Grey visited with Bishop Edward Feild in the summer of that year; the remainder are views of St. John's and selected outports, mostly on the Avalon Peninsula. What is surprising about this portfolio of sketches is that the emphasis is on landscape and not on architecture.⁴ This is surprising in light of Grey's training and his interests. At Magdalen College he had like many of his fellows become immersed in the architectural movement of the time and become a strong gothic revivalist. Feild was pleased to have him in Newfoundland not solely for his clerical devotion but also for his architectural knowledge and consequently later appointed him diocesan architect. Grey designed his own church and parsonage at Portugal Cove as well as ten other churches throughout Newfoundland. The Portugal Cove buildings could well have figured in his sketches, but in only one is a part of the church visible; in others buildings are merely another element in the landscape. His intention in publishing these sketches was to evoke in his viewers a positive

response to Newfoundland, and in that sense they were not produced for Newfoundlanders but for strangers.

The illustrated papers which became popular in the middle of the nineteenth century brought into Newfoundland an entirely new kind of print. Most were intended to have an immediate impact and be discarded. Those on topics of current interest, such as the Atlantic Cable, would generally have fallen into this category. Larger prints of a more decorative character were also published to provide the reader with a picture that might be kept, but affairs in Newfoundland were seldom the subject of such work. While papers such as *The Illustrated London News* were read in Newfoundland they were published in England and America so that, with an international readership, their Newfoundland items were not merely for their Newfoundland customers, whose numbers would not have merited such attention. The founding of *The Canadian Illustrated News* in 1869, however, marked the appearance of a magazine with items specifically of interest to Newfoundlanders.

The laying of the Atlantic Cable in the 1860s, at a time when these illustrated magazines were very popular, made Newfoundland for a while a frequent subject for engravers. The cable itself focussed international attention on Newfoundland, and Robert Dudley (fl. 1858-1898) was employed by the Atlantic Telegraph Company to record the occasion in 1865. Travelling on the *Great Eastern* he made a series of drawings which were published as part of W. H. Russell's *The Atlantic Telegraph* (1866). When the *Great Eastern* returned to Newfoundland to complete the cable-laying in 1866, Dudley provided sketches to the editors of *The Illustrated London News* for their prints. The occasion was also treated pictorially in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* and *Harper's Weekly*. In contrast with the other illustrators (Joseph Becker for *Leslie's*, Theodore Davis for *Harper's*), who contented themselves with more general views of the western terminus, Heart's Content, Dudley's coverage is admirably comprehensive. He provided sketches of the ships, the landing, the station, and the celebration and managed to capture the drama of the occasion in a way which his colleagues did not (Fig. 9). His previous trip aboard the *Great Eastern* may well have made him both aware of and involved in what was considered a very remarkable enterprise.

Two other circumstances brought reporter/illustrators to Newfoundland. The first of these was the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1860. This visit was the subject of three prints, one a pictorial of the Prince's arrival published by D. Adams, a local photographer. It is presumed that the print was taken from a photograph by Adams because the faces in the crowd are quite distinctly individual.

The other, lasting from 1859 until the beginning of the twentieth century, was the French Shore fishery dispute. As a consequence of earlier treaties, France had acquired the right to use a large portion of the Newfoundland coastline (most of it on the Gulf of St. Lawrence) for its migratory fishery. In 1859 Britain attempted to extend the rights of the French fishermen and met

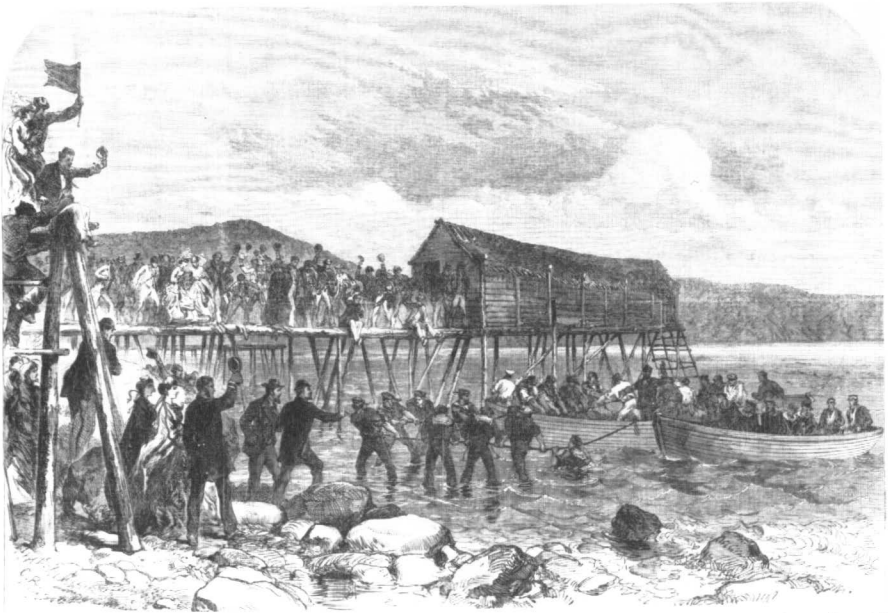


Fig. 9. Robert Dudley, "Landing the Atlantic Cable in Heart's Content Bay, Newfoundland," engraving, p. 229, *Illustrated London News*, September 8, 1866. (ETV MUN)

with bitter opposition in Newfoundland. This battle, essentially a diplomatic one so not susceptible of dramatic illustration, dragged on for years until Newfoundland finally regained control of its whole coastline in 1904. Throughout this period Newfoundland politicians, seldom failing to be troublesome, harried the British government on the matter. One print, a view of St. John's published in *Harper's Weekly* in 1891, was captioned "The City of St. John's, Newfoundland, the Colony Which is Questioning the Imperial Power." Because the situation afforded no battle scenes the illustrators made do with pictures of the cod-fishery and, inadvertently, left a good record of nineteenth-century fishing practices and equipment (Fig. 10). Another product of the coverage is the group of illustrations of the settlements on the French Shore and the Labrador coast.

A few of the magazines used the work (sketches or, sometimes, paintings) of local artists, of whom the most important was John W. Hayward (1843-1913). He carried out numerous water-colour commissions in St. John's of houses, major buildings, mercantile premises and historic events. In the 1880s Hayward prepared a number of sketches for *Harper's Weekly* of the seal hunt and the preparations for it (Fig. 11) as well as of other scenes relating to the fishery and fishery disputes.⁵ His work is distinguished from much of what appeared in the illustrated papers by the quality of composition.

While the American and British magazines tended to concern themselves with international issues it was left to Desbarat's *Canadian Illustrated News* to deal with items of more local concern. This periodical carried pictures of

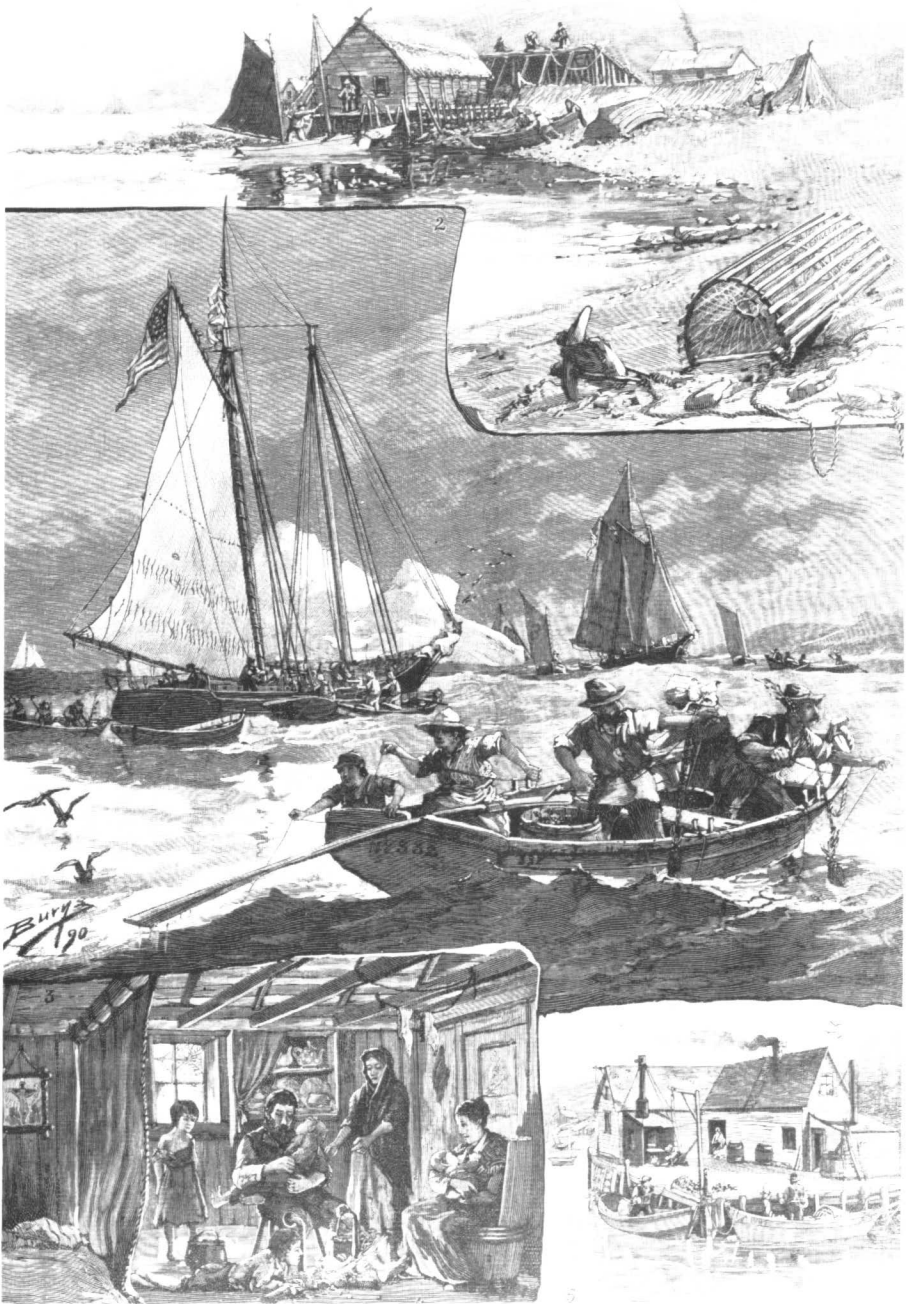


Fig. 10. J. W. Hayward, "Newfoundland and its Fisheries," engraving, *Harper's Weekly*, July 19, 1890, p. 553. (ETV MUN)

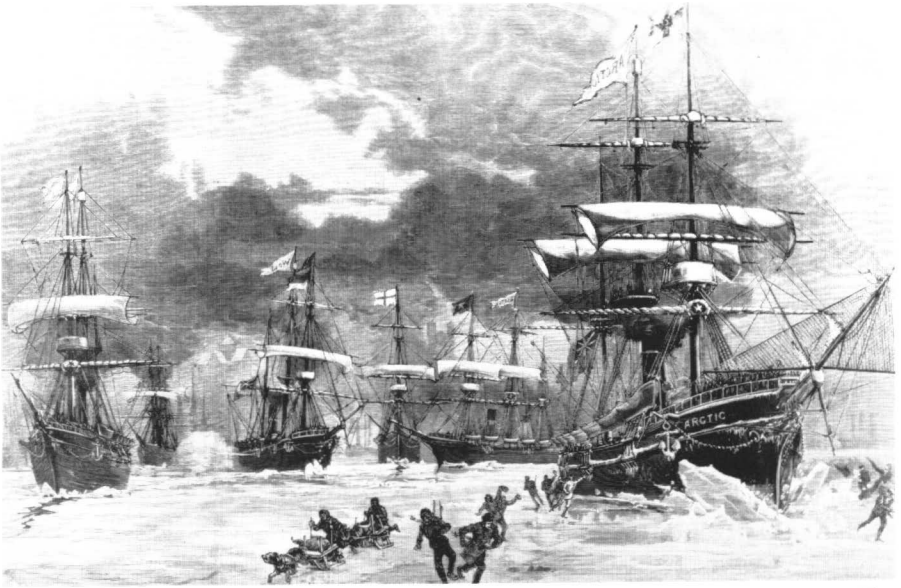


Fig. 11. Schell and Hogan (from a sketch by J. W. Hayward), "Breaking Out Through The Ice—The Sealing Fleet leaving St. John's, Newfoundland," engraving, *Harper's Weekly*, April 5, 1884, p. 221. (ETV MUN)

private residences in St. John's and of outport scenes and also in 1871 ran a series of sketches on hunting in Labrador by the Québec artist, Narcisse Têtu (1836-1878). It is reasonable to assume that this magazine did have a market in Newfoundland and was, to a certain degree, attempting to provide for that market. However the quality of prints in the *Canadian Illustrated* was generally, at least for Newfoundland material, poor. In some cases one can suggest ineptitude on the part of the artists, in others on the part of the engraver.

The late nineteenth-century vogue for panoramic or bird's-eye views did not leave Newfoundland untouched. A. Ruger did one of St. John's in 1879, and he is presumed to be responsible not only for the panoramic view of Harbour Grace but also, if one judges on the basis of style, for the prints of the Catholic cathedrals in St. John's and Harbour Grace as well as one of the St. John's Regatta. While the panoramas do not possess any great artistic merit they do serve their purpose in identifying buildings and streets within the towns shown.

The last pictorial in this survey is on a peculiarly local subject and one which records a rather bitter period in Newfoundland history—the period of religious rivalry which ran from 1832 to 1883. The pictorial *The Harbor Grace Tragedy* (Fig. 12) depicts a clash between a group of Irish-Catholics and marchers in an Orange Lodge parade on St. Stephen's Day in 1883. The encounter resulted in four deaths and was the culmination of years of bitterness and intolerance which had seen riots, house burnings and mutilations. It is probably the most commonly found pictorial in Newfoundland.

While Newfoundland's history, life and scenery have been well covered in



Fig. 12. A. T. Whitman, "Scene of the Harbor Grace Tragedy," lithograph, H. Siebert, New York, 1884. (ETV MUN)



Fig. 13. G. V. du Noyer, "Falls on the River Exploits, Newfoundland," lithograph, frontispiece, Jukes, *Popular Physical Geology*. (ETV MUN)

the engravings and lithographs of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there is one curious gap: apart from St. John's and Greenspond no

Newfoundland town is the subject of a pictorial print. Harbour Grace, economically and socially the second most important town in the latter half of the nineteenth century, merits only a panorama. Carbonear, Bonavista and Trinity, all towns of some substance, are ignored. Even in the newsprints and book illustrations these (Trinity excepted) are neglected. Despite this, the interior of the island was the subject of three prints—one a vignette of a Beothuk camp sketched by John Cartwright (1740-1824) for a 1768 map (Cartwright 1, 33), the other two by G. V. du Noyer of the River Exploits (see Fig. 13). This imbalance in treatment might be explained by the fact that for the artist/illustrator each town and scene had to be viewed as a commodity: for the journalist it had to have some value as news, for the pictorialist it had to have some value as a marketable item. St. John's was well covered because of its importance as the capital; Heart's Content and the French Shore, because of their international implications. The journalist knew where the news was, the pictorialist had to judge his market. It is the regret of social and architectural historians that the pictorialists were not more adventuresome.

Notes

¹This paper was originally prepared in 1978 for an exhibition of prints to be organized by the Memorial University Art Gallery for the National Gallery. Because the collection of prints on which the exhibition was based was not released to the Gallery the exhibition had to be cancelled. The essay appears here now in a revised version by courtesy of the National Gallery. The author would like to acknowledge the considerable assistance of the late Julia Findlay, who edited the original manuscript, and Helen Jones and Maire O'Dea of Memorial University, who offered valuable comments on the early drafts. Charles P. de Volpi's *Newfoundland: A Pictorial Record* and F. A. O'Dea's "Old Prints of Newfoundland" (*Canadian Collector* 10 [1975]:48-51) were consulted in the preparation of this paper. For ease of reference, de Volpi's plate numbers have been used for prints referred to in the text but not illustrated.

²It is likely that this print was unnoticed because, though it is illustrative of a chapter of which the author is Richard Whitbourne—a name immediately recognizable to Newfoundland scholars—the title of the chapter in the later Latin edition (1634) is "Novae Angliae," a misleading translation of the German "Dess New erfundenen Lands." The Latin might have led American scholars to the text but once they had determined its contents to be of no particular interest to them (because it was not, as it purported to be, about New England) they would have ignored it. And, it appears, no Newfoundland scholar either encountered the text or thought what would have been a version of Purchas worth consulting.

³These sketches (now on display in St. John's City Hall) were previously attributed to Colonel J. Oldfield because his name appeared on the cover of the sketch-book, but the author has recently found in *The Public Ledger* [St. John's], December 28, 1838, a prospectus "for the publishing of a series of views taken on the spot by Colonel S. Wyatt accompanied by a letter-head press description." The views listed are the same as those from the sketch-book.

⁴In his original sketch-books in the British Architectural Library (to which Sally Maltby directed me and of which Jane Pregar provided me copies) there are, in fact, numerous sketches of the Portugal Cove buildings which provide a better sense of the architecture.

⁵His drawings of the Newfoundland fisheries displayed at an exhibit in London in 1883 are listed in the *International Fisheries Exhibition* catalogue (174-75). A recent exhibition catalogue (O'Dea) presents a concise summary of Hayward's life and works.

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